

Additionally, the bill provides states with \$500 million in matching grants to improve the quality of their child welfare workforces.

“Child welfare workers perform a critical service to our most vulnerable children,” Rep. Stark said. “These children have suffered abuse and neglect all of their lives. What they need is the committed, trained help of our best child welfare workers. All too often, however, we lose child welfare workers because their caseloads are too high and they don’t earn enough money to pay their bills. Replacements for these positions are hard to find and many candidates are not qualified to do the job. The real losers in this situation are the children.”

A recent joint survey by the Child Welfare League of America, the American Public Human Services Association and the Alliance for Children and Families reported that child welfare agencies are facing a workforce crisis. The study found the average staff turnover rate for child welfare caseworkers is 19.9% in public agencies and 40% in private agencies. The study found that child welfare workers left the field because their caseloads were too high and their salaries too low. Nearly half of the welfare agencies report difficulty in finding and retaining qualified candidates for these positions.

The Child Protection Services Improvement Act seeks to improve worker retention by reducing the debt burden of child welfare workers. The bill would provide debt forgiveness to workers who have earned a bachelor’s degree or higher and who work two consecutive years for a child welfare agency. The bill also provides \$500 million to states to improve worker wages, increase the number of workers in their agencies, and to provide increased worker education and training programs.

Child welfare organizations support Rep. Stark’s legislation. “The Child Protection Services Improvement Act is a significant step toward building a more effective child welfare system -- one that can deliver on the promise of improving child safety, permanence, and well being,” said Toby Weismiller of the National Association of Social Workers.

Rep. Stark concluded: “Children in foster care and other out-of-home placements have suffered enormous hardships. Child protection services are often the last line of defense when trying to save at risk kids. We owe it to these children to provide them with caring, qualified child welfare workers who are committed to helping them and staying involved in their lives. Child welfare workers must be adequately trained and adequately compensated for their work. My bill is one step toward meeting that goal.”